

10100

# JOHN R. MOTT

## CHRISTIAN STATESMAN

*A Sermon by Dr. Burris A. Jenkins*

"I appeal unto Caesar. Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered: Thou hast appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar shalt thou go." Acts 25:11, 12.

I am to speak tonight about a man who makes his appeals to Caesars, a man whom Caesars hear, a man whose citizenship is world-wide, and whose recognition is in the courts of kings and princes.

The first time I saw John R. Mott was twenty-five years ago, in 1890, at the summer conference at Northfield, Mass., during the lifetime of Dwight L. Moody. It was one of the early conferences of Student Volunteers, in the days when that movement was not so great as it is at this hour.

I went there under the inspiration of the personal presence of Robert Speer, and in spite of the presence of Moody, Doctor Pentecost, Wilbur Chapman, and a number of others whose names then were or have become great in the esteem of the church; the personalities of these two young college men, Robert Speer and John R. Mott, were the dominant personalities in my young heart. They were boon companions and bosom friends. As the years have gone by they both have filled great niches in the world's affairs, but John R. Mott is the greater of the two.

The next time I saw him was in Kansas City, about a year ago last Christmas, on the platform at Convention Hall. As now, mature master of assemblies, he held as

[1915-1916]

in the hollow of his hand that great gathering of students, four or five thousand strong. His handclasp was the same, the look in his eye was the same, there were some lines of maturity, but he seemed as fresh and strong and young of heart as he had twenty-five years ago.

His personal appearance is familiar to many of you. See if my description tallies with your remembrance:

Square-built, athletic figure, no ounce of superfluous flesh; an undershot jaw, square and strong; sandy complexion; sparkling, keen, burning eyes, a perpetual smile at the corner of his mouth, and a perpetual frown between his brows, as if he were struggling to repress with a sense of dignity the innate boyishness and buoyancy of his nature. That struggle between the frown and the smile was the first thing I noticed about him twenty-five years ago, and was the last thing I observed upon him a year ago last winter.

Now, let me draw for you two pictures: It is in 1910, in the great old battlemented city so long the seat of the Scottish kings, and the ancient history of the north. Princess street, in all its matchless beauty, runs through the gray old town. An assembly of dinitaries is in progress. Members of parliament are there, high titles, bishops and archbishops, Hindu potentates, and scholars from all the ends of the earth, kings' messengers, and in the center of the stage, presiding, sits a young American some forty-five years of age; on his right, the Archbishop of Canterbury; on his left, Lord Balfour, of Burleigh, the herald of King George; and all about him, thirty to forty warring organizations, figuratively armed to the teeth, one against another. They say that John R. Mott is the only man in the world who could have managed that assembly. They say he was almost brutal in his management, but never lifting his voice above tones of gentleness! Can you conceive of the combination?

Another picture: Less than a year later, under the shadow of the dome of historic St. Sophia, in Constanti-

nople, over the door of which mosque, once a Christian temple, are still engraved deeply and unobliterated the sacred words, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples," this same young American is presiding over an assemblage of two hundred delegates from all the leading universities of the world, planning and debating whether or not this dead line between Mohammedanism and Christianity should be crossed by one force or by the other.

In his short career of some twenty-five years, this young American has presided over just such assemblages of intellectual leaders and lights of the world, in all the great university towns and capitals round the belted globe; at Buenos Aires, at Athens, at London, at Paris, at Berlin, at Calcutta, at Singapore, at Hongkong, at Sewall, at Adelaide and Melbourne, at Johannesburg and Manila, the most widely traveled modern man alive.

It is to this man that President Wilson, only two years ago offered the portfolio of the ministry to China, and he refused it, saying he had larger work to do, greater statesmanship. But why did President Wilson choose him? Because, my friends, not Yuan Shikai himself, the president of the Chinese republic, has half the influence with those four hundred millions of people—one-quarter, at least, of the population of the globe—that this young 50-year-old American possesses at this hour. What "Chinese" Gordon was to the old empire, John R. Mott is to the new republic.

John R. Mott was a minister's son. Somebody has compiled a list of preachers' sons that have become distinguished, and thereby has controverted the old and long-expressed opinion that ministers' sons never come to good ends, and are always the worst boys in town. He was born in Livingston Manor, New York. At a very early age his family removed to Iowa, next door neighbor to Missouri, and there, in the classically-named town of Postville, he spent his boyhood and got his public school education.



He was sent to a certain college in the north of Iowa, which I will not name, and he found it too religious to suit his tastes. I take it they had what Dr. T. P. Haley used to call "a greasy type of piety," which somehow did not appeal to this virile and vigorous young man, so he packed up his carpet bag and went to Cornell University, there to study for the law.

He was driving ahead, with his usual vigor and determination, and square-set jaw, when one day he was passing through the halls and heard a sentence which changed the whole current of his life. That sentence was "Young man, seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not!" He paused and listened at the open door. Then he stepped into the lecture room, where a stranger from Oxford was addressing the students. It was Stubbs, the great cricketer, who was then on his way to take his place on the China Inland Mission; and the influence of that address upon John R. Mott was so profound that from that time forward he yielded all thought of the law. In a short time he became an avowed Christian. He went to Northfield, to the Moody sessions of the summer conference. He dedicated himself to the Student Volunteer movement for one year. He went back again the next year, and dedicated himself for one more year. He went back again and dedicated himself for all his life. From that time forward he has been in the Young Men's Christian Association activities throughout the world, and here is a list of the positions which he holds at this hour.

Associate General Secretary of the International Committee of North American Young Men's Christian Associations.

Secretary of the Department of Foreign Work of North American Young Men's Christian Associations.

Secretary of the Student Department of North American Young Men's Christian Associations.

Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Student Volunteer Movement of North America.

Chairman of the Executive Committee of the World's Christian Student Federation.

Chairman of the Continuation Committee of the Ecumenical Conference on Christian Missions.

He was graduated with the degree of bachelor of arts at Cornell, in 1888, and with the degree of master of arts at Yale the following year, 1889. He received from Edinburgh University the degree of doctor of laws in 1910, and I do not know how many other universities have decorated him before and since.

Now, what is his idea? After all, it is an idea that has made him great. That idea is one of the simplest, and yet one of the most audacious that has ever been conceived or uttered by mortal man. His idea is, "The conquest of the entire world for Jesus Christ, in this generation!"

The first time I heard the sentence—I recollect it well—the shock it gave me, and the incredulity overpowered me. What! The evangelization of the world—not China, not Japan, not India, but the world—in this generation? And, bless you, it is almost done, and Mott is still young.

How did he propose to do it? In those early years from 1888 till 1900 he conceived the idea that the way to reach the world for Jesus, his Master, was through the open treaty ports of the great educational institutions. Said he, "Reach the students first, and through them reach the people." So he has been a college Young Men's Christian Association secretary all his life.

He organized the world's Christian Student Federation, and he spends his life in educational plans, reaching the students first, with a view to reaching their nations afterwards, and so successful has been his impression upon the world that students, everywhere, know him today. You cannot find a college of any size, small or great, but knows John R. Mott, and knows about his work, has been touched and reached by his influence.

When, a few years since—1910, again—the United States returned the Boxer indemnity, which was given to

us by China for our participation in putting down that rebellion—and, by the way, I am not so sure but what the master hand of Mr. John R. Mott was seen in that glorious stroke of brotherhood and international fraternity—when this fund was returned, the emperor decided that he would utilize it for sending young students to America to be educated in our universities. He selected John R. Mott to have charge of them, and the first year, 1910, Mr. Mott took personal charge of five hundred Chinese students who came to the United States for advanced education. He told the emperor at that time that he would utilize all his force to spread Christianity amongst those students. The emperor said, “Very well.”

It is a tremendous idea, my friends, the evangelization of the world in this generation, and his means is the only means by which it could be accomplished, the Christianization of the leadership, with a view to the capture of the multitude, and in Japan, at least, this consummation is already practically fulfilled. The Japanese are crying for us to take away our white missionaries. “Leave us alone with our own men, and we can take care of the field.” The time will come, possibly before Mott is fourscore years of age, when the same may be true in China. God grant it be.

His idea is that the army of missionaries in foreign lands—now six thousand strong of the Student Volunteers—should not be an army of occupation, but merely an expeditionary force. It is not to go and settle down and live forever in these distant lands that Mott believes that the missionaries should undertake, but it is to go there and fit men to take care of their own lands and preach the gospel in their own countries. Further than that, he insists upon enlisting laymen for just such work as this, on distant shores, for, says he, every nation has its holy men, and most of the heathen nations do not care anything about their holy men, nor have any vast respect for them. They are dirty, they are fakes, they are frauds, they are



guilty of chicanery, and they bleed the people, and so the people have no great respect for the holy men. "Now," says he, "when a missionary goes abroad, the people look upon him as a holy man come from America, and so they do not have the highest respect for the man who is purely and only a religious messenger." If he goes as a physician, if he goes as a merchant, if he goes as a lawyer, if he goes as a hospital attendant, if he goes in any other capacity which is secular, they will pay him more heed than they will as a paid holy man. "The thing to do," says Mott, "is to Christianize through laymen, through the students of the nationalities to which the gospel is to be preached." That is wisdom. That is statesmanship. That is a large conception of a world-wide undertaking.

John R. Mott is the field marshal of the Christian army. He thinks in terms of continents, and speaks in units of nations.

"Well, what of his personal methods?" Precise, methodical, accurate, painstaking, minute. He went round the Mediterranean a few years since with twenty-six questions written down, and every man he met he button-holed and asked him every one of those questions, and he wrote down all the answers, and he filed them away in a card catalog, and he has them now. He is a master of system. Lord Kitchener is not in it with him as an organizer. He plots and plans, awake and asleep. His desk in New York has the map of the world under glass, right beneath his eyes.

Next, what of his theology? When I was at Northfield, twenty-five years ago, the prevailing tone of the Young Men's Christian Association was that of an extremely conservative millenarianism.

Twenty-five years has made a change throughout the whole Young Men's Christian Association, whether due to the influence of Mr. Mott, or the advancing spirit of the time, I do not know, but certain it is that only this past winter, in an address that he made at Lawrence, Kansas, at the State University, he shows us the modern, scientific,

liberal, up-to-date attitude in religious thought. He has been with students too much, and knows too much of science and the advancing spirit of the age, not to know that the message for this present day must be a message in harmony with the best thought of the age, and so his conceptions are broad and fine and high. For instance, he accords to the religions of other lands and other nations a respect and a tolerance for all that is valuable within them. Is there anything in Hindu philosophy that we can learn and appropriate? Can we sit at the feet of Rabindranath Tagore? Mott is ready to listen. Is there anything that Mohammedanism can teach us about zeal and determination, relentless energy and temperance? Mott is ready to hear. Is there anything that Buddha can give us of humanitarianism, of service, loving, devoted service to God's little ones, the poor? Mott is ready to hear. It is not his spirit that the missionaries should go into distant lands and say to the people, "You are all wrong. You are benighted heathen!" His diplomacy and his statesmanship are too great for that. His idea is that we must go into the nations' strongholds of religious thought and put our own Christianity up for comparison with theirs, and say, "Choose you which is the best."

Further than that, he recognizes all the time, as the wisest missionary leadership of today is recognizing, that Christianity, after all, is an Oriental faith, and that we need have no fear that it will not be wisely and sympathetically weighed by Orientals to whom it is presented. Nay, more than that, that we can look for applications and revelations of the value of Christianity itself, when once the Eastern world has taken hold of it, that have not yet entered into the minds of us to conceive.

Fancy, when Mohammedanism, with its zeal and its almost fanatic determination, lays hold upon Christianity, how it will make it go. Fancy, when India, under her immemorial banyan trees, and in her cane brakes, and in her circles of the dust, turns her powerful, philosophical



mind upon Christianity and its problems, how she will penetrate to their depths! And conceive how China, Confucianism, with its ethics, its uncompromising integrity and honesty, applies itself to the utilization of Christianity, what effect it will have upon all the Western world. These are the large conceptions of that movement which dares to undertake to evangelize the world in this generation.

My friends, looking at it from a purely secular standpoint, I would rather take my chance with John R. Mott in history than with—Oh, well, John D. Rockefeller, in the ages that are yet unborn. Five thousand years from now, when the dome of the capitol at Washington has gone to the owls and the bats, and travelers from far lands look upon the prehistoric relics of the once mighty people who dwelt on the Potomac and the Mississippi, I wonder if history won't read something like this:

"John D. Rockefeller. American. Descendant of Timon of Athens, of the kindred of one Croesus of Greece. He obtained a monopoly upon a strange inflammable fluid with which this prehistoric people used to light their homes and streets. He possessed, thus, an absolute authority, even over the students, for the student could not pore over his printed page until he paid his tax to the great John D. Rockefeller. Like Croesus, he thought himself the happiest of men."

And then I fancy such history saying of another American:

"John R. Mott. A knightly young cavalier, who not only preached but led the crusade of the Twentieth Century, which ended in the conquest of the entire world for the final, universal religion of mankind, which it enjoys at this very hour."

That is not fanciful, altogether. John R. Mott believes that Jesus Christ holds in his hand the solution of the problems of the world; that he, and he alone, can settle for China and Japan their differences; that he, and he alone, can untangle for the vast and almost unborn re-

public of the East the intricate and difficult ways which it must tread during the next four hundred years. He believes that Jesus, and Jesus alone, can scatter the jungles of India, can dissipate the pestilence and famine that so long have shrouded and held down the wonderful spiritual power that lies locked up in that distant, darkened land.

John R. Mott believes that Jesus is the Magician with the wand that is to re-create and make anew the world in which we live, of which we are a part, and he is giving his life in unreserved devotion to this end.





